

MEXICO, LA LINDISIMA PAIS

V. F. Beliajus

(NOTE: The article on Mexico is being printed in three installments. 1) General Information in the December issue; 2) Churches, Shrines and Pyramids in the Jan.-February issue; 3) Fiestas and Miscellany in the March-April issue.)

(Continued From Last Month)



"Guadalajara the Gorgeous", one of the loveliest cities of Mexico. A city of sights and enchanting beauty. Above is a picture of the immense cathedral which took centuries to build (1571—1908). The interior is exquisite and rich. It also contains an original by Murillo. To do justice to all which Guadalajara and environs have to offer one should spend there at least one week.

Fiestas, Old and New

Besides pyramids, churches, burros and cacti, Mexico is also a land of Fiestas. Some fiesta or another goes on somewhere in the country at all times. It is only a question of finding it and getting there. Not all fiesta places are accessible as far as car transportation is concerned, but even if one has to walk some 8-10 miles, it will be worth the trouble.

Practically all fiestas have a religious flavor and almost all are dedicated to a certain patron saint of their locality. Fiestas require a great deal of preparation and they often last a nine day "Novena" period. The Fiesta to our Lady Del Remedios lasted two weeks.

Fiestas do not mean in any way that there will be dancing taking place. In the two week fiesta at Remedios, only one afternoon was set aside to dancing when a group of natives presented their pre and post-Cortezian group dances. The dancing is a minor event in the fiesta. The religious pageantry, however, is the major part.

At Remedios, September first ushered in the two week fiesta, but preparations have taken place much earlier, perhaps weeks earlier. The village homes were decorated with paper bunting and streamers, the streets were arched with banners. The gateways and doorways to the church had additional gateways of flowers in decorative designs and letters of flowers with prayers and praise to the Blessed one of Remedios, while the church within was like a flower conservatory. Since ear-

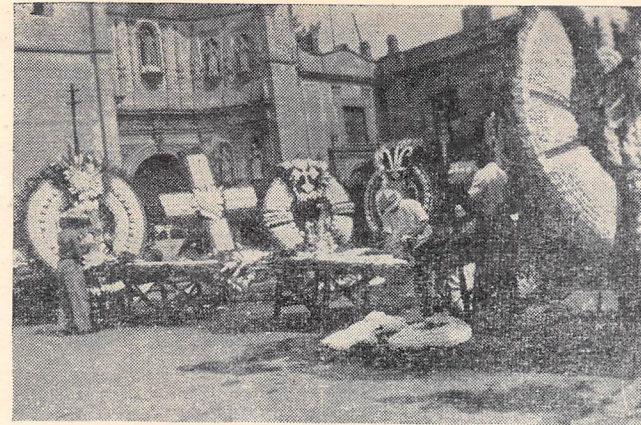
ly morning the streets were going under a busy construction period, constructing tents and stalls, for a kermess is an integral part of the Fiesta. Indians bringing their wares, heaviest loads over the back with a band suspended to their forehead — in this manner they seem to haul loads which seem impossible. These "merchants" arrive from everywhere and from great distances, afoot, by bus or burro. The variety of objects is great . . . ceramics, jicaras and other lacquered wares, serapes of every description and color, rebozas (dito) and what not, and, of course, foods, cokes and pepsicola.

On the temple compound, and within the church, activity was also intensive. The Bishop of Mexico City was to open the fiesta by celebrating Mass which was scheduled for 11:00 A.M. His arrival to the grounds was set for ten. An orchestra, more correctly, a band, practiced and played various Mexican and old Spanish, as well as Kalo (Spanish gypsy), music. Within the church movement was constant. Group upon group of worshippers arrived, falling upon their knees crawling down the central nave to the very altar with candles in one hand, while women, often with babes tied to their backs with a reboza, crawled thus burdened. At the railing each group received communion which was dispensed before Mass was to begin, for during Mass it would have taken a great amount of time to take care of the multitude.

It was interesting to note the type of people present. Every tribal representation was evident as were age groups and social strata. India peasant garb from various districts; serapes, tiponas, tilmas, rebozas, mantillas and babushkas; bare footed orshod in guaraches; fancy and well tailored city clothes, charo blouses, guayaviras and tatters, all came in what ever they have, to pay their homage to the Blessed One.

Before eleven A. M. most of the people, led by the acolytes and priests, went forth to meet the Bishop and followed him down the nave. One can hardly describe the anticipation and awe felt by the congregation at his entrance, the prevailing spirit that seemed humble and august in one breath. The bells were pealing. Outside fireworks exploded as if at a battle front. Within the church song burst forth from the choir, incense smoke and scent along with those of the flowers wafted in the air. The bishop's entrance was followed by a rush of people which seemed by the thousands, jam-packing every available (and unavailable) spot in the church. The Mass was rich, served by His excellency, many priests and many acolytes. The ritual was elaborate and the singing was enchanting. The Mass lasted for three hours! That did not terminate the religious part of the Fiesta, for various other forms of service continued throughout the day and week. In the streets multitudes moved to and fro, buying, selling, hawking, eating, exchanging news, discussing problems and having a good time by just merely being at the Fiesta. Everything seemed cheap, but no one has any money to speak of. Their needs are simple and very few, but all present were happy and gay.

The modern Fiestas lacked all this color. They were bare of everything. We witnessed a modern Fiesta in Ciudad Victoria on the Pan American Highways. Somehow the North-eastern part of Mexico felt the effects of the "Reforma" heaviest, plus the "Americanization". Originally this was the only route to Mexico City from the U.S. Many tourists traversed this road and the impact with the Americans is felt strongly. Due to the reformatory edicts there are barely a half dozen churches in a thousand mile stretch. Village upon village are without a church to add color to their bare lives and



Elaborate funeral wreaths is but one of the thousands of subjects that go with the traditions around the dead among the Mexicans. Of all nations in the world perhaps no other has developed a more intense and a more cheerfully elaborate Necromania than did the Mexicans, vestiges of their ancient beliefs. It is evident throughout the year but on Nov. 1st and 2nd it is out of this world. Every city vies with something unique, distinct and unusual celebrating the day (fiesta) of the dead; obligatory visits to cemeteries, music, incense, flowers, parades, perfumes, caskets, candles, dolls, animals, art objects made of sugar, candies and pastries and special breads of skeletons, ribs, skulls and some such other "pleasant" reminders of death. The cemeteries are a sight! But if you are ever in Mexico on the above dates be sure to be either in Oaxaca or Puebla. All cities "put the dog on" in honor of death, but Oaxaca has them beat. You will have a time of your life and love it. (Pictures by Francis Hanson).

to give something to the people to cling on to. Their contact with the American tourist has caused the elimination of regionalism, costume and color considered Mexican. The church in Ciudad Victoria (a cathedral, mind you), must have previously gone through a thorough profaning job. The cross is without the Corpus Christi, the sacred pictures and the Stations of the Cross are cheap prints, single electric bulbs, without any adornment, no matter how simple, hang from the ceiling suspended to it by a nail. The whole interior was sorry looking.

That night the town held its fiesta without the benefit of the church. The Alameda (central park or square) had stalls for every device of chance and gambling. Around the park everyone was in the promenade, from two to ten abreast. The men were walking in one direction on the inner side, while the girls were walking in the opposite direction. They circled the park about half a dozen times; by then they knew whom they wanted to date. This time (or earlier) the men sprinkled a bag of confetti over the girl of his choice, and if she was pleased with the chooser, she left the girl's promenading section and joined him to walk around within the park, watch the chance games, listen to the music, be treated with a pepsi-cola or Mexican sweetmeats.

A band was playing on the stand continually, the hawkers at the chance game tables blaring away over loud speakers loud enough to raise the dead. About 10:00 P.M. another orchestra appeared, a street was blocked off and there was dancing on the street. Not a single Mexican dance was done — occasionally a rumba type of son, otherwise it was strictly American jazz, ragtime and jitterbug. A queen was crowned about 1:00 A. M., dancing and the racket continued until 4:00 A.M.

Riveroll Fiestas

In Mexico City, North American tourists are assured of one Fiesta each week which is held at Riveroll's Art Galleries. Riveroll is an American from Louisiana who made good in Mexico. He took over an old mansion not far from the Alameda and every Wednesday evening he treats the Americans with something of Mexico in the way of folk lore. His intentions are honorable and he knows how to cater the type of clientele which frequents his place. The program is the same whether you came in January 1950 or whether in July 1940. One must credit him for acquainting the Americans with at least one phase of Mexican life, and he does it under good coloring in favor of the Mexicans. His clientele, for the most part, is an Acapulco type of crowd who commute between Acapulco and Hotel Regis. There are many who are not of that caliber but find Riveroll as the only accessible source for this type of work. There are some dance teachers who are under the impression that this is the spot where one can pick up the "McCoy" in Mexican dancing. The only dance most of these dance teachers know is the "Jarabe Tapatio" and over it they "gaga" and are thrilled with sections of dance which is like the way they do it. Admission is 10 pesos, which is a lot of money, and admissions are by reservations only. The place is packed.

Because of the type of clientele, and because Mr. Riveroll is a astute business man and M. C., the presentations and introductions are with his clientele in mind. It is presented as one would to a night-clubbing crowd of an American Chez Parree outfit. Same type of jokes and the same type of horsing around between the M. C. and the audience. No denying, the Mariachis band was good, the solo singer was fine (tho her manner of presentation was definitely night club stuff), and the dances, tho stagey (particularly Iguiris), were genuine enough.

The following dances were presented: Iguiris (Michoacan), Jarabe de la botella (Jalisco), Jarabe Michoacano (Michoacan), La Bamba (Vera Cruz), this latter dance was particularly good. A reboza was stretched out on the floor, and without using hands and with continual dancing, the man and the woman tied the reboza in a big double bow. Janana Yucateca (Yucatan), La Pluma (Oaxaca), Juanita (Tehuana), Los Viejitos (Michoacan) well and cleverly done; and the Jarabe Tapatio (Jalisco), known to Americans as the "Hat Dance". The girls didn't appear (for the most part) Mexican, but they could have been from Guadalajara in Jalisco where practically the entire population is anything but Mexican looking; many of the Jaliscans could easily be mistaken for Lithuanians or Scandinavians. A strain of pure Spaniards predominate in Jalisco.

After the program the guest are treated with a Tequila cock-tail, (a pint of Tequila in several gallons of diluted fruit juice), served in a ceramic cup which the guest may take home as a souvenir.

Mexican Migrant Workers In The U.S.

Occasionally we met a Mexican with a knowledge of a few English words. Upon inquiring they seem out to be the "migrant" workers who were in the United States during a single season. At first, I was wont to inquire gleefully: "How did you like it out there?" but after a few very negative and derogatory responses, I, for the heck of it, continued inquiring but cautiously and with anticipation of hearing nothing complimentary.

The Mexican migrant workers consist of a cross section of the Mexican population. Some are Indians, some are villagers, some are city folk and some are students